
NEWS RELEASE

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Virginia Highlights Consumer Protection Week

RICHMOND – The Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR) joins federal, state, and local agencies and consumer advocacy organizations in launching the ninth annual National Consumer Protection Week. This year's theme – *Read Up and Reach Out to Be an Informed Consumer* – focuses on gathering and sharing information so consumers can be more confident, savvy and safe in the marketplace.

By official proclamation, Governor Tim Kaine has recognized February 4 - 10, 2007, as Virginia Consumer Protection Week in the Commonwealth. Consumer information can help people recognize a rip-off, smell a scam, or find a fraud. Arm yourself with basic skills before entering into financial transactions for professional services – whether you are hiring a contractor, buying a hearing aid, bidding at an auction, or in the market for real estate.

DPOR TIPS FOR CONSUMERS

- **Deal only with properly licensed professionals** who meet state standards for expertise and performance. Virginia requires licensure for dozens of professions and occupations, ranging from architects and contractors to auctioneers and real estate agents.
- **Ask friends and neighbors** for referrals. An advertisement in the telephone book or on television is not necessarily a good indication of quality.
- **Get everything in writing – and read the fine print.** You might assume that a “contract” should look like a contract, but anything you sign could be used as a legal document. Do not sign anything until you completely understand what you are signing, and agree to all the terms.
- **Don't pay 100% of the bill until the job is 100% complete.** Try to limit your down payment and do not allow payments to get ahead of the work. Never pay cash, and keep all canceled checks or credit card receipts.
- **Take your time!** Never allow yourself to be rushed into making a decision or purchase. And remember the old adage, “If the offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is!”

Consumers with complaints against individuals or businesses regulated by DPOR should call (804) 367-8504 or download a complaint form at <http://www.dpor.virginia.gov/dporweb/complaintform.pdf>.

To read Governor Kaine's proclamation for Virginia Consumer Protection Week, visit <http://www.governor.virginia.gov/CitizenServices/ConstituentServices/Proclamations/2007/VirginiaConsmProt.cfm>.

For more information about National Consumer Protection Week, visit <http://www.consumer.gov/ncpw>.

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About DPOR:

The Virginia Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR) regulates nearly 40 commercial occupations and certain professions. The agency licenses or certifies more than 300,000 individuals and businesses ranging from architects and contractors to cosmetologists and professional wrestlers.

DPOR investigates reports of regulatory violations by licensees; pursues complaints of criminal activity by unlicensed practitioners; responds to business-related consumer inquiries and requests for license checks; administers recovery funds for consumers harmed in contractor or real estate transactions; and conducts mediation services and public awareness campaigns.

For more information, visit DPOR online at www.dpor.virginia.gov.